

Parking Reform 101

End Costly Parking Mandates to Support Abundant Housing and Economic Vitality

Why eliminate parking mandates?

Parking mandates are pervasive and harmful. Parking reform has become a critical tool for legalizing and facilitating abundant housing and vibrant urban development. Zoning codes almost always include parking minimums that force developers to build a set number of parking spaces per housing unit or per square foot of commercial development. These mandates significantly increase development costs and create unnecessary barriers to housing production and local entrepreneurship.

Parking mandates are arbitrary and unsupported by evidence. Minimum parking requirements [are not based on rigorous scientific analysis](#) and lack substantial support from data on actual parking demand. In surveys of communities separated by just dozens of miles, parking mandates for land uses like funeral homes, bowling alleys, and restaurants can vary by a factor of 2-15 times, illustrating the arbitrariness of these mandates. The result is costly and excessive parking that businesses and residents do not want or need.

Parking mandates restrict freedom of choice. Parking requirements force car-free and car-lite households to subsidize parking spaces they don't need. Vehicle ownership is higher among wealthier households, meaning lower-income residents effectively pay more for parking they don't use. Even in counties considered very car dependent—places like Orange County, FL, or Maricopa County, AZ—more than half of renter households have access to one car or no car—[57% in both cases](#). Reducing minimum parking mandates would make housing more affordable and equitable for those who rely on public transit or other means of transportation.

Excessive parking is wasteful. A single parking space, with access aisles, takes up 300-400 square feet. Municipal policies have arbitrarily required or encouraged the construction of massive quantities of car parking, resulting in at least three parking spaces for each of the 260 million cars in the U.S. This excess of parking lots wastes valuable land and perpetuates car dependency. Surface parking lots alone consume more than 5% of urban land nationwide. Common parking requirements for restaurants and retail lead to parking lots that are 1-3 times the size of the buildings they serve.



What are some of the costs of parking mandates?

High parking costs drive up housing prices: Parking spaces are expensive to build. Surface parking can cost upwards of \$5000 per stall, while above-ground structured parking is easily [\\$20,000 to \\$60,000](#) or more per stall. These costs are passed on to renters and homeowners, raising monthly housing expenses by [\\$200 to \\$600 per month](#). Off-street parking mandates also reduce the number of housing units that can be built on a given site, exacerbating the housing shortage. Eliminating parking minimums would help make housing more affordable and accessible.

Parking mandates stifle entrepreneurship. Small businesses, particularly those in urban areas, [struggle with the overhead costs](#) of providing large parking lots. This makes it difficult for them to open or expand and leads to vacancies and demolitions in historically walkable neighborhoods. Parking minimums give national corporations a significant edge over local businesses, as larger companies are better equipped to absorb the costs associated with required parking.

Parking mandates discourage vibrant, walkable communities: In suburban areas, surface parking lots make walkable, human-centered neighborhoods impossible by spreading out development and promoting sprawl. In urban areas, mandatory parking displaces potential housing or community space, while reinforcing the need to drive. Eliminating parking minimums can [reduce vehicle trips by 10-30%](#), easing traffic and lowering emissions.



What are the effects of eliminating parking mandates?

Parking reform is gaining momentum. Since 2017, [at least 74 American cities](#) have fully eliminated parking mandates. This trend includes large cities like San Jose, California, and Austin, Texas, as well as a host of mid-size cities like South Bend, Indiana, and small towns like Lansing, Kansas, or Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Since 2021, Parking Reform Network has



tracked [65 state bills across the country](#) that have begun addressing parking policy, reducing or eliminating mandates for specific land uses, housing types, or urban areas, paving the way for urban development that is more responsive to present-day needs.

Eliminating parking mandates does not eliminate parking. Instead, it allows developers and businesses to tailor parking supply to actual needs. Research shows that in cities that have removed or sharply reduced parking minimums (such as [Buffalo](#), [Seattle](#), and [Minneapolis](#)), the amount of parking supplied for new apartment buildings has gradually decreased by 10–40%, demonstrating that parking provision can align better with market demand.

Eliminating parking mandates creates new possibilities. In Seattle and Buffalo, over 60% of new homes built since recent parking reforms are in buildings that would have been illegal under the prior parking requirements. A growing list of cities including Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Sandpoint, Idaho, report that the elimination of commercial parking mandates has resulted in [new, successful local businesses](#) occupying long-vacant spaces.

Eliminating parking mandates does not prevent residents from finding parking. In addition to the reality that private property owners will often continue to provide off-street parking, municipal governments can also ensure that on-street parking is available and convenient when needed by managing their curbs, using tools including demand-based pricing and permit programs. The relaxation of parking mandates can also encourage the sharing of parking among private landowners, leading to greater efficiency.